

2023

Hans Christian
Andersen Award
Nominee

FINLAND



ILLUSTRATOR

LINDA BONDESTAM



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1. Biographical information

website: www.lindabondestam.com

Linda Bondestam (b. 1977) is an artist, illustrator, and writer based in Helsinki, Finland. She has studied illustration in the Buckinghamshire and Kingston universities in London, obtaining her BA in Illustration in 2001.

Bondestam is one of the most prominent children's book illustrators in the Nordic countries. She made her debut as a children's book illustrator in 2003, illustrating Mikaela Sundström's book *Linnéa och änglarna*. In 2018, Bondestam debuted as a children's author with *God natt på jorden* (*Good night, Earth*) which she also illustrated. She has since authored and illustrated several books of her own.

As of today, Bondestam has illustrated more than 40 children's books for Finnish and Swedish publishers, and her books have been translated into several languages including Arabic, Belorussian, Croatian, Danish, English, Finnish, German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Russian, Serbian, Turkish and Ukrainian.

Bondestam's illustration work has been exhibited numerous times, both in Finland and internationally, e.g in Germany, Iceland and South Korea. She has also created works of art for public spaces such as libraries, hospitals and community centers both in Finland and Sweden: Her public works of art can be seen in Kirkkonummi library, BVC Hudiksvall and Luckan – the Finland-Swedish Information and Cultural Centre in Helsinki. Bondestam has also worked with animators to create animations of *Silk Monkey's Laughter*, *The Admirable Mr. Happy* and *Say Hey*.

Theater is another important way of artistic self-expression for Bondestam; she is an active member of the theatre group Teater Tapir that creates and performs high-quality children's theatre.

Bondestam holds chair number 11 in the Swedish Children's Book Academy since 2019.







2. Contribution to literature for young people

By Marianna Lammi

As a children's book illustrator, Linda Bondestam has a distinctive, highly recognizable, yet constantly evolving "Bondestamian" style. She works skilfully with contrasts; dark, intense colours that make her happy brights and jewel-tones stand out. Her illustrations are often collage-like in nature, consisting of various textures and techniques: she combines broad brush strokes and bright, wild patterns with drawings of miniature-sized, peculiar, scurrying creatures.

Humour is an integral part of Bondestam's illustrations. Her books allow the readers to dream and share literary experiences together. Her characters are individualized in great detail, each suggesting that they, too, have their own life stories and singular personalities that the reader is free to envision for themselves.



Timeless and highly contemporary themes

Bondestam has illustrated books for various writers across Finland and the Nordic countries. The themes of her books are often timeless and universal, such as grief and loss (*Silkesapans skratt*, 2020; "Silk monkey's laughter" with Annika Sandelin), growing old (*Allan och Udo* 2011, "Allan and Udo" by Minna Lindeberg) and the sheer joy and freedom of imagination (*Djur som ingen sett utom vi* 2016, "Animals that No One Has Seen Except Us" with Ulf Stark).

Bondestam's books also take on highly contemporary topics such as body positivity (*Den ofantliga Rosabel* 2017, "The amazing Rosabel" with Malin Kivelä), family diversity (*Ägget* 2018, "The Egg" with Sanna Sofia Vuori), the environmental crisis (*Mitt bottenliv. Av en ensam axolotl* 2020; *My life at the bottom. The story of a lonely axolotl*, written by Bondestam) and the integration process and the internal struggle of a travelling-alone refugee child (*Ni är inte min mamma* 2021, "You are not my mother" with Frank Furu). A recurring, over-arching theme in her artwork and storytelling is the right to be oneself.

In Bondestam's books, the text and the image create a whole new place in the reader's mind, with illustrations adding, contrasting, or twisting the textual content. Such is the case in *Om du möter en björn* ("If you meet a bear" with Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup) in which Bondestam elevates the barren, matter of fact, and tongue-in-cheek writing with her illustrations. The result is a simultaneously hilarious, terrifying, and thought-provoking book: First, it introduces us to an innocent boy scout and a cunning, devious bear, then a monstrous, roaring bear who flips the horizontal-shaped book into a vertical form for the duration of one spread, depicting the bear standing on his hind legs. In the end, our boy scout runs away as the tranquil bear, the unconquered king of the forest, calmly observes his exit, casually popping pink bubble gum.

Bondestam masters the expression of emotions and feelings through her illustrations, their colours, compositions, surroundings, and tiny details. Thus, she is able to shift the mood in a book rapidly or subtly from one page to another, such as in *Silkesapans skratt*, in which the shared joy and bliss of friendship and love is embedded in unspoken sadness that takes form as the silk monkey falls ill and subsequently dies. The tapir, the silk monkey's most beloved friend, is devastated, angry and sad, but the beauty of the jewel-colored mangrove forest brings comfort to the reader.

The critically acclaimed *Mitt bottenliv* opens with a motive of the planet Earth and a quote stating how fragile life is. From a colourful Eden in the first double-page, the book quickly time travels into a capitalist dystopia with pollution, biodiversity loss, technology addicted people, litter, and multinational corporations invading both the physical and spiritual space.

The eponymous main character lives through similar mood changes from its initial, relative happiness into sorrowful loneliness, as all of its friends leave the waters they have lived in, and climaxes in an apocalyptic storm. In the midst of the darkness, another axolotl, born and raised in a pet shop, emerges, and they end up having 987(!) babies, thus terminating the protagonist's loneliness.

Mitt bottenliv is a biocentric book which focuses on the axolotl, a representative of the species on the brink of extinction in the wild, even though numerous in captivity. The book zooms into the axolotl's home lake and remains with it, never mentioning humans again. *Mitt bottenliv* concludes with another picture of planet Earth and a quote affirming how life has a tendency to prevail. *Mitt bottenliv*, like *Om du möter en björn*, has already attracted a lot of scholarly interest despite both being recently published books.

Bondestam's collaborations

Linda Bondestam has worked together with renowned Swedish children's author Ulf Stark on four books: *Diktatorn* ("The Dictator" 2010), *Allt det här* ("All of This", 2012), *Min egen lilla liten* ("My Little Small", 2014) and *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* ("Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us", 2016). The aforementioned book won the Nordic Councils Children's and Young People's literature prize in 2017.

In the illustrations of the book *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* different colour and shape surfaces as well as thin penmanship are merged in a collage-like manner. Colourful illustrations, along with wildly imaginative animals, paint immersive, beautiful natural landscapes with deep red skies and intense turquoise forests, seas, mountains, and urban areas. Each spread is a work of art in its own right, presenting purely fictitious, imagined animals and their habitats.

In Stark's and Bondestam's most translated collaboration, the picture book *Diktatorn*, the illustration is inspired by retro 1960's and 1970's Soviet imagery: large patterns, stripes, dots, army green and red stars that express the little protagonist's wish to be a dictator, while the wonky perspectives highlight his naivete. The characteristic Soviet ambience is further enhanced by bus tickets, magazines and candy wrappers found in Russia.

Together with writer Minna Lindeberg, Linda Bondestam has published four books including *I en grop i Kalahari* ("In a Pit in the Kalahari", 2007) *Lo fridlyst* (2009, "Lynx, Protected"), *Allan och Udo* (2011) and *Boggan och Kyösti Kekkonen* (2015). *Allan och Udo* depicts two old men, their love and dreams, loneliness, and growing old. The general



impression in the illustrations is that of light and playfulness. The book is exhilaratingly anarchistic and unconventional, bursting with amusing combinations of graphic shapes and partial photos, funny faces and small observations in a city setting.

Bondestam challenges gender norms in *Boggan och Kyösti Kekkonen* by presenting the big sister as an androgynous character who destroys flowers in a pink landscape, while Little Brother Kyösti plays the flute in a cherry tree. Bondestam portrays a unique, summery picture of nature by combining romantic and grim images. In the book *Den förträfflige herr Glad* (The Admirable Mr. Happy 2004) by Malin Kivelä, Bondestam's joyful and entertaining illustration overflows with sunlight and puts the reader in a good mood, thus matching and further developing the mood of Kivelä's writing. In another book by Kivelä, *Bröderna Pixon och tv:s hemtrevliga sken* ("The Brothers Pixon and the cozy glow of the television" 2013) Bondestam's illustration is dramatic, shifting from dark and gloomy to downright hilarious, showing her diversity as a visual storyteller.

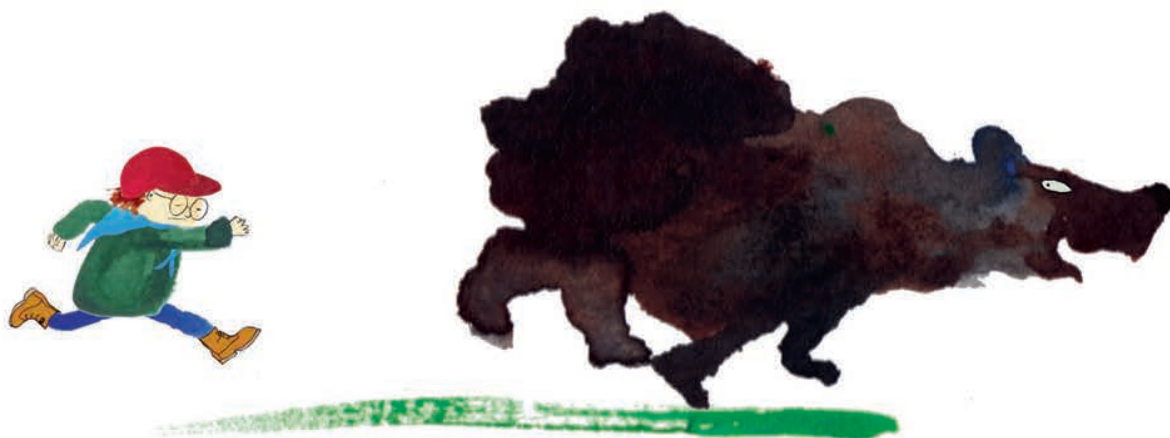


Prominent prizes and nominations

Bondestam has been publicly recognized for her contributions to children's literature numerous times. She has been nominated and awarded several prizes both as an illustrator and for specific books, underlining her importance in the field.

Bondestam has been nominated for Finlandia Junior Prize four times, the Nordic Council's Children and Young People's Literature Prize in 2013, 2017, 2021 and 2022, the August Prize in 2016, 2019, 2021, and 2022. She has received honorable mentions for The Most Beautiful Books of the Year Prize several times. Bondestam was the first recipient of the Vanessa Prize (Vanessapriset) in 2016. She was also nominated for Elsa Beskow prize in 2021. In 2022 she received Alli Paasikivi Foundation's acknowledgment for her ecologically, societally and artistically extraordinary work for families.

Djur som ingen sett utom vi was awarded the Snöbollen Prize for Swedish Picture Book of the Year in 2016, as well as the Nordic Council's Children and Young People's Literature Prize in 2017. *My Life at The Bottom* was also a pick for the White Raven Catalogue 2021 and *Om du möter en björn* is nominated to Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava for 2023. ↙





3. Interviews and articles

On the writer's island

Published in Helsingin Sanomat

27.8.2022

By Susanna Laari

Translation by Josefin Öst

Illustrator and writer Linda Bondestam is one of Finland's most internationally acclaimed children's book creators. Here, she talks about how children's literature reacts to societal change.

Whoops, better hold on to something now! Children's author and illustrator Linda Bondestam is clearly a driver who enjoys a bit of speed. Clad in a blue captain's hat, the writer navigates the familiar route to the summer cottage, situated in the Tammisaari archipelago. Water splashes against the sides of the old boat.

Bondestam's dog Amos, a four-year-old labradoodle, is clearly also enjoying the ride. He follows his owner everywhere and is more mellow around visitors if he gets to come along to pick them up. While the rest of the family returned to Helsinki in August for work and school, Amos has stayed behind at the island to keep his owner company. Bondestam is now on crunch time, doing the last bit of work before her book *Good Morning Space*, due to be published in autumn, is to go to print.

"This island is my woman cave. During the final weeks before deadline, I draw from morning till night, eating pretty much nothing but ramen", Bondestam says. This scenario is repeated a couple of times every year. "For my family's sake, it is better that I am not at home then: I don't do anything besides sitting at my work desk, and I am not there for anybody."

Bondestam is one of Finland's most internationally acclaimed children's book creators. She was the recipient of the Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Prize and she is a four-time nominee for the Finlandia prize as well as a three-time nominee for the Swedish August prize. A little known fact is that Tua Forsström is not the only Finn to be a member of the Swedish Academy: Bondestam is also a member, more specifically of the Swedish Academy for Children's Books, where she occupies chair no. 11.

Bondestam has also been translated into several languages. Besides Finland and Sweden, her books have been



published in Italy, Germany and the U.S, just to name a few. Before the Covid pandemic, the illustrator travelled 50 days out of the year, going to book fairs and festivals around the world to give talks, hold workshops and meet colleagues.

However, it is now the end of August, and the archipelago is quiet. As the boat reaches the shore, Bondestam leaps onto the dock, rope in hand. The old, red cottage looks like it has stood on the plot forever. Just as adorable are the outbuildings: the boat shed, sauna and upper cabin. Inside, Bondestam climbs the creaky, red-painted stairs to her office. Under the sloped roof, her desk is brimming with books and sketches. In the middle of it all is a large computer screen – the most important tool of the modern-day illustrator.

Before starting work on the computer, Bondestam always creates a draft on paper. The result is something like a taped together, miniature book. "This one is absolutely dreadful. I had a nicer one, but I gave it away to the publisher", she says, laughing as she flips through her sketches. It illustrates nicely, however, what the creator means when she says that the book will be interactive: The little reader can add or switch out layers of clothing, and change the looks on the character's faces. One of the spreads will have a hole in it, another one a door. One page is cut in the shape of slithering worms, but as you turn the page the shape has morphed into a tail.

Having drawn every last little cup, fork and figure onto the paper, Bondestam takes her pictures through the scanner. Because she likes as loose and free a line as possible, her sketches and drafts often end up in the final version of the book. Her signature collage-style technique is achieved by scanning different surfaces, for example marbled book covers or water colour paintings. In order to create one illustration, she might work with more than 200 different layers, from which she builds the final picture. "It is a bit like a puzzle. I like that things can be rearranged if something goes wrong. On the computer, I can also simply redraw a pair of eyes if I'm not pleased with how they turned out."

Bondestam has had around 30 books published together with different writers, but in recent years she has started creating books on her own as well. Good Morning Space is the third book she has created all on her own, and it is the sequel Good Night Earth, published in Finnish four years ago. The idea that became Good Night Earth came straight from her own life. "I have three kids, and getting them to go to sleep is always terribly difficult for me.

I don't know why I didn't learn with the first-born, but I have spent hours upon hours reading them good-night stories", Bondestam muses with a laugh.



In *Good Night Earth*, the aliens are observing the earthlings in their evening routines, but in the coming book, tables are turned as us earthlings are looking out into space. In the story, a child wakes up early in the morning, grabs their home made, toilet roll binoculars, and starts observing the strange inhabitants of outer space. "At the same time, the parents are waking up, and mummy is really, really tired. It is humour aimed at families with small children", Bondestam says.

Bondestam has previously worked with, among others, Sinikka and Tiina Nopola, Annika Sandelin, Malin Kivelä and Ulf Stark. Working with other writers' texts, Bondestam says that she has always been given fairly free rein. "Of course, I always listen to the writers, but it is really important to me that I get to tell a story with the illustrations that is not just reinforcing what the writer is saying, but that tells you something else as well. And as the readers read the book, their own imaginations add yet another layer onto the story.

Although Bondestam's upcoming book deals with everyday situations, she reminds us that children's literature is a genre that is able to react fast to societal change. For example, last year she illustrated the book *You are not my mother*, written by Frank Furu. The book tells the story of a Somali girl, who comes to Finland without her parents. In her book *My life at the Bottom* she deals with global warming, all through the story of an axolotl being threatened by extinction. And already, books are being published about the war in Ukraine and the Covid pandemic. "No subject is too difficult to be dealt with in children's literature, but there always has to be a glimmer of hope to the story", she states.

The biggest issue in children's literature is that the readers are not finding the books, since so much less is written about them in the media compared to adult literature. Apart from short book presentations, only the winner of the Finlandia Prize in Children's and Youth Literature gets any attention in newspapers.

"It tells you something about our children's general status in our society, which is very sad." As a creator, she also fears that parents want to read their own favourite childhood stories to their children, and that they therefore often buy the classics, even though there are a lot of good contemporary books chronicling the time we are living in right now. "That is a shame, because children deserve and also have the right to good contemporary literature.

Bondestam studied to be an illustrator at Kingston university at the turn of the millennium, but starting a career isn't easy for an unknown creator. Then she met Sara Ehnholm Hielm, who then worked at the small publishing house Söderströms förlag. She has now been working with Ehnholm Hielm for 20 years. "When you are young, it is important that there is even one person who trusts and believes in you, and that you get to learn and progress."

She suspects that the small Finland Swedish publishing house gave her as a young, new creator more freedom than a larger publisher would have. "I get to be wilder when money doesn't rule everything. These days Finland Swedish children's literature is really blossoming, and the books are being translated into lots of languages."

"Someone might think that children's book creators are very competitive toward each other, but that is not true. Me and my good colleagues Sandelin, illustrator Jenny Lucander, and writer Lena Frölander-Ulf have a small theatre group together, and we have lots of fun performing", Bondestam tells. The Tapir theatre has three children's shows and one play for adults on its repertoire. The last one is a late-night show, where the material is among other things Sandelin's and the late Stella Parland's bold poems. Acting provides a welcome change to Bondestam's lonely day job, although she claims to always be very nervous before a performance.

"Some poems are a commentary on #metoo in quite a humorous way, if there is such a thing. For me, acting is a way to be wilder than I normally am."

Bondestam reveals that before a book goes to print, she mainly stays up worrying about having the time to make all her last-minute corrections.

"I usually only notice that something isn't working right as the process nears its end. Then I am quick to take out the scissors. During those final days, I might still switch up the places of the illustrations, fix the facial expressions of the characters, or even change up the plot. But I might need that stress, because that is always when I come up with the best solutions."

The hardest thing about the job, however, is the endless sitting in front of the computer, as a result of which Bondestam suffers from back pain. Luckily Amos the dog makes sure she takes breaks, as he demands to be taken on walks. "I have a pedometer, and I try to hit 10 000 steps every day." At the cottage, this means that the writer must walk around the island eight times. ↵



Let's Talk Illustrators

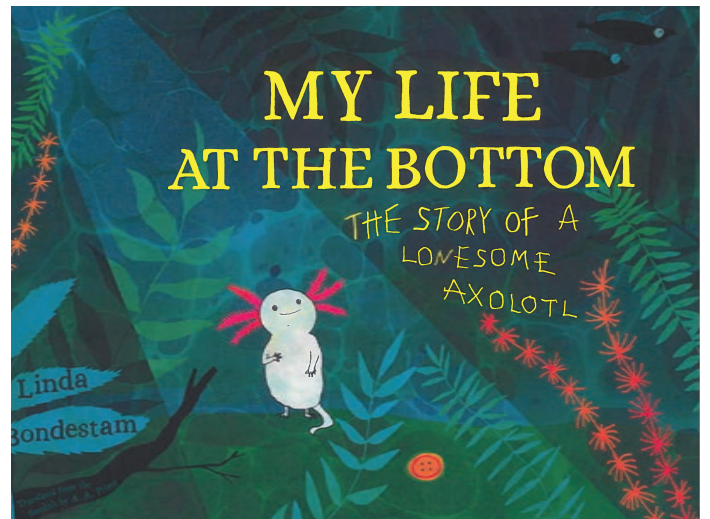
#218: Linda Bondestam

Published on the blog Let's Talk Picture Books

July 26, 2022

By Mel Schuit

[Link to original article with pictures](#)



I feel super lucky that I got a chance to talk to Finnish author-illustrator Linda Bondestam about her illustration and story processes for *My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl*! I hope you enjoy our conversation about this special book, which highlights the critically endangered (but incredibly friendly) axolotl.

About the book:

In a forest of seaweed there was ME, a rare and beautiful little axolotl, going for my first-ever swim.

*So graceful, and yet so lonesome--out of 987 eggs, mine was the only one that hatched.
Who knows, maybe I was the last axolotl in these waters?*

At the bottom of a lake in Mexico City, our axolotl narrator goes to underwater school, collects treasures tossed away by the big lugs on land, and has dance parties with tiger salamander friends. Life is good!

But as the world gets hotter and hotter, the water gets murkier. Friends become harder to find, and the lonesome axolotl grows even lonelier. Until one day when, out of the blue, a colossal wave carries the axolotl into a surprising new future...

Let's talk Linda Bondestam!



LTPB: Where did the idea for *My Life at the Bottom* come from?

LB: It was a long process, but everything started in Italy many years ago when I saw a photo of a very strange creature, an axolotl. It was like a mixture of an alien and a smiling baby – very strange and almost cute. I immediately understood that I had to make a book about it. The axolotl actually first appeared in my book *Good Night, Earth*, but that was really just a warm up!

LTPB: Can you talk about your research process for this book, including your visual research of axolotls? What challenges did you encounter?

LB: I read a lot about this little animal and it was a shock to understand that it might already be extinct in the wild. I understood that the climate crisis fitted smoothly into the story, and I read many books on the topic. The axolotl is a fantastic creature and just like our planet it has the ability to regenerate if it gets hurt.

I also watched many nature documentaries - I wanted the reader to get close to the axolotl in the book and interested in nature in the same manner as when watching a film by David Attenborough.

My biggest challenge when making the book was how to end it. I wanted the book to be hopeful and warm despite the seriousness of the theme.

I really wanted the reader to feel close to the axolotl and get more interested in nature.

LTPB: What did you use to create the illustrations in this book? Is this your preferred medium? How does your process change from book to book?

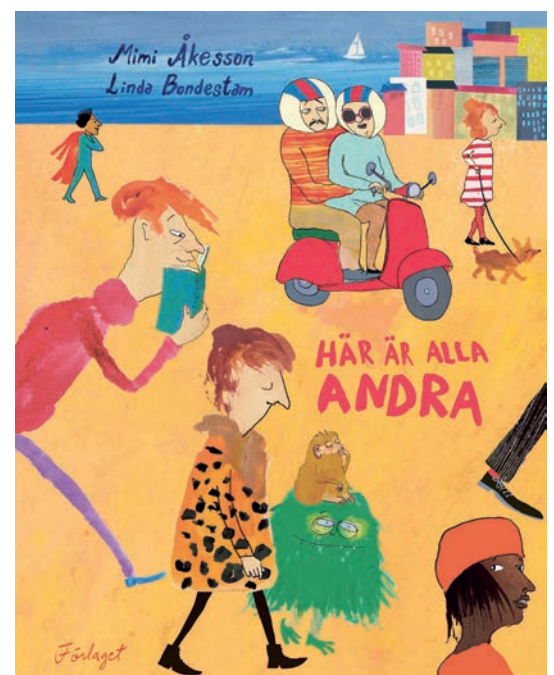
LB: I used a lot of different media when creating the book: pencils, watercolors, ink pens and collage etc. I always try to find a style that suits the story I'm working on at the moment. In the end I still put together my pictures in Photoshop, which I really enjoy. It's like a magician's hat, so many tools you can get creative with and it also helps me organize my work and control the colors in the book.

I found some marbled papers that were perfect for making the lake in the book. Many surfaces are hand painted with watercolours.

I really enjoy drawing my characters in sketchbooks using simple line drawing. Quite often I draw different body part separately to be able to colour in a more convenient way in Photoshop.

LTPB: What are you working on now? Anything you can show us?

LB: I've just finished a picture book by a Swedish writer named Mimi Åkesson, it's a book that makes the reader think a lot about different kinds of groups and belonging. The book has hundreds of characters so it was a huge job!



LTPB: If you got the chance to write your own picture book autobiography, who (dead or alive!) would you want to illustrate it, and why?

LB: Actually, I realized *My Life at the Bottom* has a lot of autobiographical elements. But it is just the first part of my life so it will have to be continued.

There are so many good illustrators out there, it would be hard to choose. Maybe I would pick Jenny Lucander or Lena Frölander-Ulf who are not only great illustrators but also my great friends. We also share a theater group and we've been through a lot so I think they would know what they are working on. At the same time I have a feeling I would have to do it myself because all my storytelling starts with pictures.

Thank you so much to Linda for talking to me about this book! *My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl* published earlier this year from Yonder! ♡





4. Complete bibliography



Author & Illustrator

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- **Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl** (Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2020) *My Life at the Bottom*
- **God natt på jorden** (Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2018) *Good Night Earth*

Illustrator

- **Här är alla andra**, words by Mimi Åkesson (Förlaget/Natur & Kultur, Finland & Sweden 2022)
Here is Everyone Else
- **Ni är inte min mamma**, words by Frank Furu (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2021)
You Are Not My Mother
- **Om du möter en björn**, words by Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup (Förlaget/Berghs/Jensen og Dalgaard, Finland/Sweden/Denmark 2021) *If You Meet a Bear*
- **Silkesapans skratt**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2019)
Silkmonkey's Laughter
- **Mustekala löytää trikoot**, words by Sinikka Nopola (Tammi, Finland 2019) *The Octopus Finds Tights*
- **Yokos nattbok 3: Nattsvart och underbart**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget, Finland 2019)
Yoko's Night Book 3: Pitch Black and Wonderful
- **Mielikutitusystävä**, words by Aleksandra Salmela (Teos, Finland 2019) *The Imaginary Tickle-friend*
- **Ägget**, words by Sanna Vuori (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2018) *The Egg*
- **Den ofantliga Rosabel**, words by Malin Kivelä (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2018)
Rosabel – The Marvellous Pony
- **Säg hej**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget, Finland 2017) *Say Hey*
- **Yokos nattbok 2: Pinsamt och livsviktigt**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget, Finland 2017)
Yoko's Night Book 2: Embarrassing And Super Important
- **Djur som ingen sett utom vi**, words by Ulf Stark (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2016)
Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us
- **Boggan och Kyösti Kekkonen**, words by Minna Lindeberg (S&S, Finland 2015)
Boggan and Kyösti Kekkonen
- **Min egen lilla liten**, words by Ulf Stark (S&S, Finland 2014) *My Little Small*
- **Yokos nattbok**, words by Annika Sandelin (S&S, Finland 2014) *Yoko's Night Book*
- **Simo ja Sonia ja ujo mummo**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2014)
Simo, Sonia and the Shy Grandma

- **Bröderna Pixon och tv:ns hemtrevliga sken**, words by Malin Kivelä (S&S, Finland 2013)
The Pixon Brothers and the Cosy Glow of Television
- **Allt det här**, words by Ulf Stark (Söderströms & Schildts, Finland 2012) *All of This*
- **Papupiilokas**, words by Eppu Nuotio (Otava, Finland 2012) *The Hiding Bean*
- **Businnan blir kär/Retkuliina rakastuu**, words by Annika Sandelin (Söderströms/Teos, Finland 2011)
Miss Mischevous Falls In Love
- **Gekko ja Puupponen ja suloinen Rose**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2011)
Gekko and Puupponen and the Sweet Rose
- **Allan och Udo**, words by Minna Lindeberg (Söderströms, Finland 2011) *Allan and Udo*
- **Gekko ja Puupponen**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2010) *Gekko and Puupponen*
- **Diktatorn**, words by Ulf Stark (Söderströms, Finland 2010) *The Dictator*
- **Gnatto Pakpak**, words by Stella Parland (Söderströms, Finland 2010) *Gnatto Pakpak*
- **Simo ja Sonia eli kadonnut Kerala**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2009)
Simo and Sonia or the Lost Kerala
- **Lo fridlyst**, words by Stella Parland Minna Lindeberg (Söderströms, Finland 2009) *Lynx, Protected*
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Anna and the Strange Delay of Winter
- **Vem är rädd för ... Berättelser om vargen, antologi** – *Who is afraid of... Storys about the wolf*
(anthology, Finland 2008)
- **I en grop i Kalahari**, words by Minna Lindeberg (Söderströms, Finland 2007) *In a Pit in the Kalahari*
- **Min bror Lev**, words by Mikaela Sundström (Söderströms/Tammi, Finland 2007) *My brother Lev*
- **Milja och grannarna**, words by Annika Sandelin (Söderströms/Tammi, Finland 2006)
Milja and the Neighbours
- **Delirium – romanen om en hund**, words by Stella Parland (Söderströms, Finland 2004)
Delirium – The Tale of a Dog
- **Den förträfflige herr Glad / Великолепный Господин Весельчак**, words by Malin Kivelä (Söderströms 2004 / Samokat 2007 / Teos, Finland 2010) *The Admirable Mr Happy*
- **Katastrofer och strofer om slummer och stoj**, words by Stella Parland (Söderströms, Finland 2003)
Disasters and Strophes of Slumber and Fun
- **Linnéa och Änglarna / Linnea ja äiti enkeli**, words by Mikaela Sundström (Söderströms/Tammi, Finland 2003) *Linnea and the Angels*







5. Significant Works

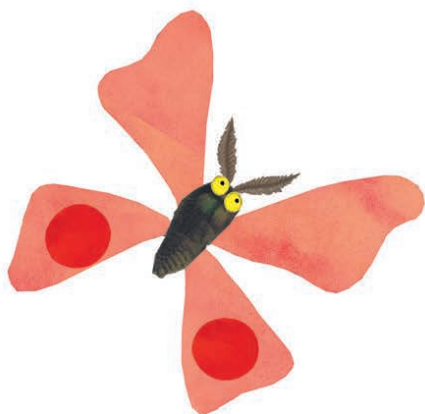
The following ten books have particularly gained attention and appreciation from readers and critics alike.



1. *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us

Words by Ulf Stark
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2016)

Author Ulf Stark's and illustrator Linda Bondestam's book about animals that no one has seen has been called a modern classic. This brilliantly illustrated book presents 27 very peculiar species, which no-one but their creator has ever seen – in splendid colors and with ingenious rhymes.



2. *Ni är inte min mamma* You Are Not My Mother

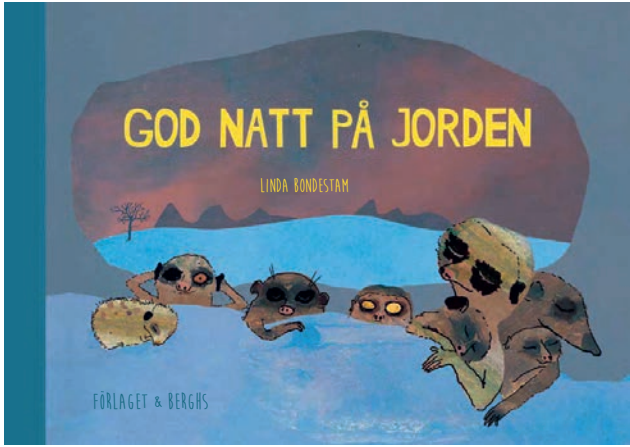
Words by Frank Furu
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2021)

A wistful picture book depicting a little refugee girl's emotional journey.

Aysha is on her own in a strange new place, Finland. Together with other children she lives at a reception centre. Sometimes in school, when her classmates say something silly, she can't seem to find the words to respond and frustration takes over.

The adults around her do their best to look after and comfort her. They are friendly, they cook and eat together with Aysha, talk to her and stroke her hair. But they are not her mother, heartbroken Aysha thinks to herself as she dreams of the scent of breakfast canjeeros and longs for her life back at her home village. Some days are good and some gloomy, but there is always someone to comfort her and a lap to sit on. Aysha is not alone.

This is an important and stopping story based on real events. A touching narrative by author Frank Furu combined with illustrator Linda Bondestam's delicate colour palette.



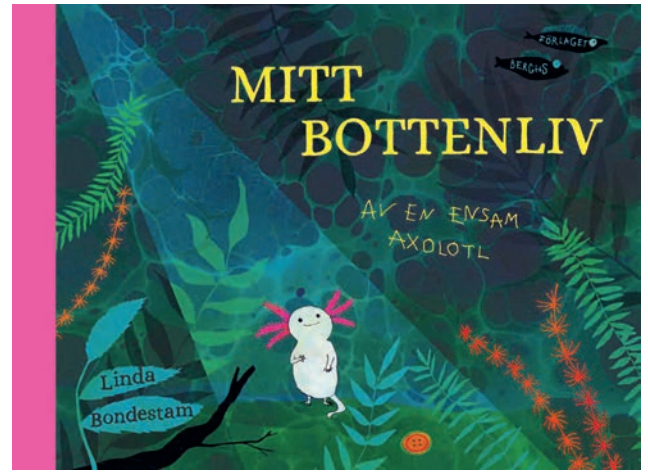
3. *God natt på jorden* Good Night Earth

(Förlaget/Bergths/Teos, 2018 Finland & Sweden)

Every night, all children go to sleep peacefully. Or do they?

Under the water, in the jungle, in Antarctica, in the big cities, and on other planets – every evening, little creatures are tucked in and expected to go to sleep for the night. But going to sleep looks a little different for everyone. Bondestam provides a sweet look into different bedtime routines of animals all around the globe.

For the special bedtime moments, this is Linda Bondestam's first book written and illustrated by the artist. It is a simple, cozy, and beautiful bedtime story that stands out with its visual storytelling. We are treated to Bondestam's distinctive choice of colour, a dash of humour, a varied landscape, and several surprises along the way.



4. *Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl* My Life at the Bottom

(Förlaget/Bergths/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2020)

2020 August Prize Nominee and a selection for the White Raven Catalogue 2021!

An enchanting story about the ongoing climate change, as told by a lonesome axolotl.

Each year, several species go extinct, disappearing from the surface of the earth forever. A unique and perfect being, the result of millions of years of evolution, suddenly no longer exists. With this in mind, Bondestam has written an engaging tale about one particular, endangered species: The axolotl.

An axolotl is a tiny, smiling amphibian that lives its entire life at the larval stage, which means that it never really grows up. In this picture book, we meet what might be the last of its kind. He thrives in his own pool where he hangs out with tiger salamanders, collects treasures, and spies on the peculiar two-legged beings on the beach. But as it gets hotter, the pool gets cloudy, and everyone disappears. The poor axolotl is left all alone. Then one day, a giant wave sweeps everything away, and the axolotl embarks on a journey to the unknown.

Linda Bondestam's happy, ecological, and existential book tells us about life on earth – it is so fragile, but at the same time robust. A surprising and moving story about climate change, and about just how dull it is to play alone. A touching story combined with beautifully detailed illustrations of the wonders of the underworld.



5. *Om du möter en björn* If You Meet a Bear

Words by Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup
(Förlaget, Finland/Sweden/Denmark 2020)

A quirky field guide on what to do if you encounter a bear in the forest. This book encourages dialogue about the relationship between humans and animals. A must-read for every aspiring outdoor adventurer!

This amusing picture book attempts to offer advice about what to do and not do if you come upon a bear while venturing into the forest. Should one run away, climb high – or maybe just offer your honey jar to the bear?

Up north, as we go camping, hiking or berry picking, we are quite aware of the possibility of bumping into a bear on our adventures. In this book filled with offbeat humor, the authors attempt to advise a child who actually encounters one. This laugh-out-loud, how-to guide is brought to life by Bondestam's expressive artwork that captures the contrast between the dangers of the dark forest and the exuberant, cheerful storytelling.



6. *Silkesapans skratt* Silkmonkey's Laughter

Words by Annika Sandelin
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2019)

This much-needed book, set in Bondestam's wonderfully jewel-coloured jungle, opens up the difficult theme of death in a gentle and caring way, suitable for children and adults alike. The text carries strong feelings, but it is accessible and healing at the same time.

Deep in the jungle, the Tapir sees his best friend Silkmonkey getting sick and fading away. Once she is gone, he is angry, sad and confused. He gets upset with everyone around him, even though all other animals – Sloth, Parrot and Bear – try to make room for him in his sorrow. Little by little, Tapir accepts his loss and realizes that he is not the only one who misses Silkmonkey.



7. *Den ofantliga Rosabel* Rosabel – The Marvellous Pony

Words by Malin Kivelä
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2018)

A delightful story of Rosabel, a sturdy little pony, who is teased by the beautiful show horses at the stables she shares with them and her mother. But Rosabel chases after her dreams, and when given the change she gallops into the forest in search of freedom. She finds a very special friend, who teaches her that not everybody needs to be a show horse.

With delicious artwork and dark humour, this is an uplifting story about finding your own self-worth. The book was nominated for Runeberg Junior Prize in 2018.



8. *Diktatorn* The Dictator

Words by Ulf Stark
(First published by Söderströms, Finland 2010.
Current edition: Förlaget/Berghs, Finland/Sweden)

This is a revolutionary picture book about a very small dictator.

Dictators decide on everything. They must check that the sun goes up and the moon comes down. In Kindergarten, they decide who gets to play with what. You absolutely cannot kiss a dictator. There is a lot to think about when you are a dictator - particularly yourself.

But as it turns out, some people do not like dictators. Some people do not want to play with dictators in Kindergarten. Perhaps being a dictator isn't so fun after all.

A quirky, poignant and hilarious picture book about stubbornness and learning to play nicely.



10. *Ägget* The Egg

Words by Sanna Vuori (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2018)

A charming picture book about three friends trying to track the origins of a mysterious egg. They bravely set out into their apartment building, visiting their neighbours, and face some big questions along the way: What is a family? Where do we come from? We get to look in on different family constellations, and hear about how they came to be.

This story, peppered with dry humour, is a refreshing take on the classic "Where do babies come from", mixed with popular urban stories of diversity and people living in flats close to their neighbours. Linda Bondestam's illustrations show a quirky take on everyday life in her trademark detailed style.



9. *Min egen lilla liten* My little small

Words by Ulf Stark
(S&S, Finland 2014)

A touching story about a lonely creature living in the dark, longing to have something small to take care of. Then one day, she meets a tiny ray of sunshine. The sunshine has to leave her by the end of the day, but that doesn't really matter - the time they get to spend together means everything.







5. Translated editions

- ***Djur som ingen sett utom vi, Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us:***

- Italy: Iperborea. *Animali che nessuna ha visto tranne noi*. 2021. Translation by Laura Cangemi.
- Lithuania: 700 eilučių (Social Innovation Institute). *Žvėrys, kurių niekas nematė, tik mes*. 2022. Translation by Elžbieta Kmitaitė.
- Denmark: Lamberth. *Dyr som ingen andre har set*. 2019. Translation by Lena Lamberth.
- Norway: Cappelen Damm. *Dyr som ingen så unntatt vi*. 2018. Translation by Anne Østgaard.
- Latvia: Liels Un Mazs. *Zvēri, kurus neviens nav redzējis, tikai mēs*. 2019. Translation by Juris Kronbergs.
- Belarus: Koska. *Звяры, якіх ніхто не бачыў, апроч нас*. 2019. Translation by Alesia Basharymava.

- ***Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl, My Life at the Bottom***

- Denmark: Carlsen Nord (Lindhart & Ringshof A/S). *Mit liv på bunden*. 2022. Translator unknown
- Korea: Jakkajungsin Publishing CO. Not yet published
- Germany (Worldwide): Limbion Ug. Not yet published
- USA (Worldwide): Restless Books. *My Life at the Bottom*. 2022. Translation by Annie Prime.
- Faroe Islands: Bókadeild Føroya Lærarafelags. *Mítt botnlív*. 2022. Translation by Sanna A. Dahl.

- ***God natt på jorden, Good Night Earth***

- USA (worldwide): Restless Books. *Good Night, Earth*. 2021. Translation by Galit Hasan-Rokem.
- Korea: Jakkajungsin Publishing CO. Not yet published

- ***Om du möter en björn, If You Meet a Bear***

- Italy: Iperborea. *Se incontri un orso*. Mars 2023. Translation by Maria Valeria D'Avino.
- The Netherlands: Hoogland & Van Klaveren. Not yet published

- ***Ni är inte min mamma, You Are Not My Mother***

- Denmark: Carlsen Nord. *I er ikke min mor*. 2022. Translator unknown

- ***Min egen lilla liten, My Little Small***

- Italy: Iperborea. *Piccolina tutta mia*. 2022. Translation by Laura Cangemi.
- USA: Enchanted Lions. *My Little Small*. 2018. Translation by Annie Prime.
- Germany: S. Fischer Ferlage. *Graugrau und Fünkchen*. 2016. Translation by Birgitta Kicherer

- ***Katastrofer och strofer om slummer och stoj, Disasters and Strophes of Slumber and Fun***

- Russia: Detgiz. *Катастрофы и строфы о дрёме и шуме*. Translation by Mikhail Yasnov

- **Diktatorn, The Dictator**

- Spain (Spanish & Catalan; worldwide): TakaTuka. *El dictador*. 2022. Translation to Spanish by Carolina Moreno Tena and to Catalan by Meritxell Salvany.
- Ukraine: Osnovy Publishing. *ДИКТАТОР*. 2018. Translation by Galina Kirpa.
- Russia: KompasGuide Publishing House. *ДИКТАТОР*. Translation by Maria Ludkovskaya.
- Italy: Lantana editore sr. *Il dittatore*. Translation by Camilla Storskog.
- Latvia: Liels un mazs. *Diktators*. Translation by Uldis Bērziņš.
- Serbia: Fabrika knjiga. *Diktator*. Translation by Slavica Agatonovic.
- Lebanon: Dar al Saqi. *الدكتاتور (Al diktatur)*. Translation by Maria Pakkala & Sampsa Peltonen.
- Turkey: Altin Kitaplar. *Diktatör*. Translation by Özkan Mert.

- **Simo ja Sonia eli kadonnut Kerala, Simo and Sonia or the Lost Kerala**

- India (English, Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali): Sampark Publishing.
Translator unknown

- **Yokos nattbok, Yoko's night book**

- Sweden (Persian): Daad Bokförlag Handelsbolag. Translator unknown

- **Yokos nattbok 2: Pinsamt och livsviktigt, Embarrassing And Super Important**

- Sweden (Persian): Daad Bokförlag Handelsbolag. Translator unknown

- **Yokos nattbok 3: Nattsvart och underbart, Yoko's Night Book 3: Pitch Black and Wonderful**

- Sweden (Persian): Daad Bokförlag Handelsbolag. Translator unknown



7. Awards & Nominations

AWARDS

- 2016: Snöbollen – Swedish picture book of the year
- 2017: Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Award
- 2022: Family Initiative Prize - Alli Paasikivi foundation

NOMINATIONS

- 2003, 2014, 2019, 2021: Finlandia Junior
- 2010, 2012, 2016–2022: Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award
- 2013, 2020, 2021: Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Award
- 2016, 2020, 2021: August award
- 2019, 2021, 2022: Runeberg Junior award
- 2020: Arvid Lydecken award
- 2021: Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava (for My Life at the Bottom)
- 2021: White Raven Catalogue
- 2021: Elsa Beskow award



8. Book reviews

“My Little Small,” by Ulf Stark and Linda Bondestam, Tells a Sweet Fable with Philosophical Musings

By Mary Ann Scheuer

March 29, 2018

[Link to review](#)

Ulf Stark and Linda Bondestam’s sweetly eccentric picture book “My Little Small” tells the story of a creature who lives alone in a cave until she befriends a sun spark. On the surface, it’s a story of finding a small friend to care for. Dig a little deeper, and Stark’s philosophical ruminations come through.

Ulf Stark and Linda Bondestam’s sweetly eccentric picture book *My Little Small* opens itself to many layered interpretations. On the surface, it’s a story of finding a small friend to care for. Dig a little deeper and Stark’s philosophical ruminations come through.

*“In a mountain, deep in a cave
In the dark, there lives a Creature.
The sun hurts her eyes and her skin, too.”*

Like her mountain cave, the Creature is “gray, gray, gray.” Bondestam’s whimsical illustrations produce a Creature with large, expressive eyes, an oblong body, and pointy teeth.

Hidden away during daylight to escape the harmful rays of the sun, the Creature leads a solitary life, yet she craves companionship. “She dreams of the moon and of having someone small to sing to and care for.” Her yearning turns to anger at times, and she grinds the rocks of her cave between her teeth. When night falls, she emerges from her cave, marveling in the soft colors of the sunset, the lake, and the distant city.

Young readers will relate to the Creature’s many emotions as she wrestles with her loneliness, longing, and frustration.

The lonely Creature explores her nighttime environment, looking for something small to care for. The Creature does not just want to find companionship; she wants to

become a caregiver, providing love and protection. Although readers do not know why she seeks this out, they will relate to the feeling of wanting something small to love and protect. After all, this is one reason why young children like to play with small stuffed animals and baby dolls.

She tries swimming out to the reflection of the full moon, but the moon shatters “into a thousand gleams.” She tries stacking boulders on top of the highest mountain so she can reach the moon, but the rocks always tumble over.

*“One morning, something bright comes flying into
her cave.
A sun spark!
It hovers before plummeting
straight to the ground.”*

Terrified that it’s so dark, the little Spark squeals in alarm. The startled Creature asks, “Will you be my very own Little Small?” But the Spark isn’t sure—what could this strange creature be?

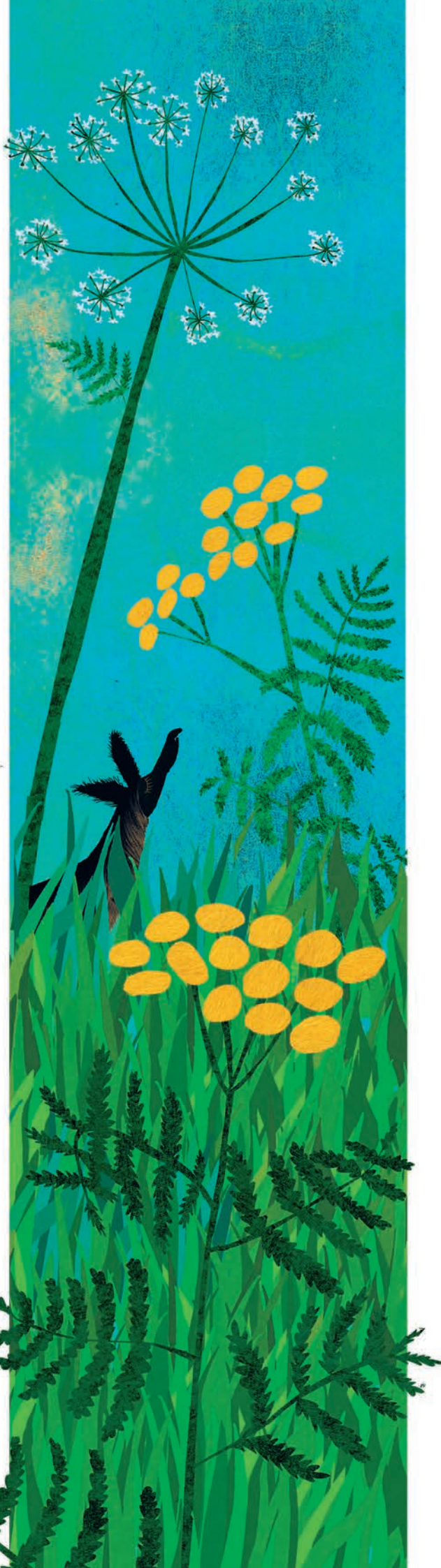
*“Leave me be!” the Spark squeals again. ‘Are you going to damp me down or snuff me out?’
‘Oh, no,’ says the Creature. ‘I’m going to care for you for a thousand million years.’
‘But I can only live for a single day.’
The Creature wants to hug the Spark, but it would hurt her. So she lifts the Spark up in her hand instead.”*

And thus begins a sweet, brief friendship. The little Spark tells the Creature of the sun and the sun's colors. She describes the "vast, blue ocean" and the "hot, yellow, empty desert." The Creature tells her new friend stories of the adventures they'll have. Even though they only have one day together, their friendship sparkles and shines. After sending her beloved Little Small back to the sun, the Creature closes her eyes so she can "see all the colors the Spark lit up inside of her."

Young readers may see this as a simple story of friendship. On a deeper level, this existential story is a rumination on savoring the moment, making connections, and reaching beyond borders. Even though the Spark only lives for one day, the Creature reaches out to make friends. Both of them seize the moment and live it fully. When it is time to send the Spark off to return to the sun, the Creature does not hesitate. Young readers are left with the sense that the Creature has grown from this experience, is happier and more satisfied. Perhaps the ultimate message is that caring for others is what brings our lives satisfaction and meaning.

Stark, who died in 2017, was a leading Swedish author and screenwriter who wrote more than one hundred books for children of all ages, ranging from picture books to poetry to young adult fiction. (See this reflection on his life and work excerpted from *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*.) Finnish artist Linda Bondestam, for her part, has been nominated for the 2018 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. (Readers may enjoy seeing this short video of her drawing and creating picture book illustrations in 2012.) *My Little Small* is not Stark and Bondestam's first collaboration. Together, they have written and illustrated several picture books, winning the 2017 Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Prize for their picture book *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* (Animals Nobody Has Seen Except Us). They also won the 2016 Snöbollen (Snowball Prize), awarded each year in Sweden to the best picture book, for the same title. *Min egen lilla liten* (the original version of *My Little Small*), was nominated for the Finlandia Junior Prize in 2014. ↵

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My Little Small – a picture book review

By Joy Murray

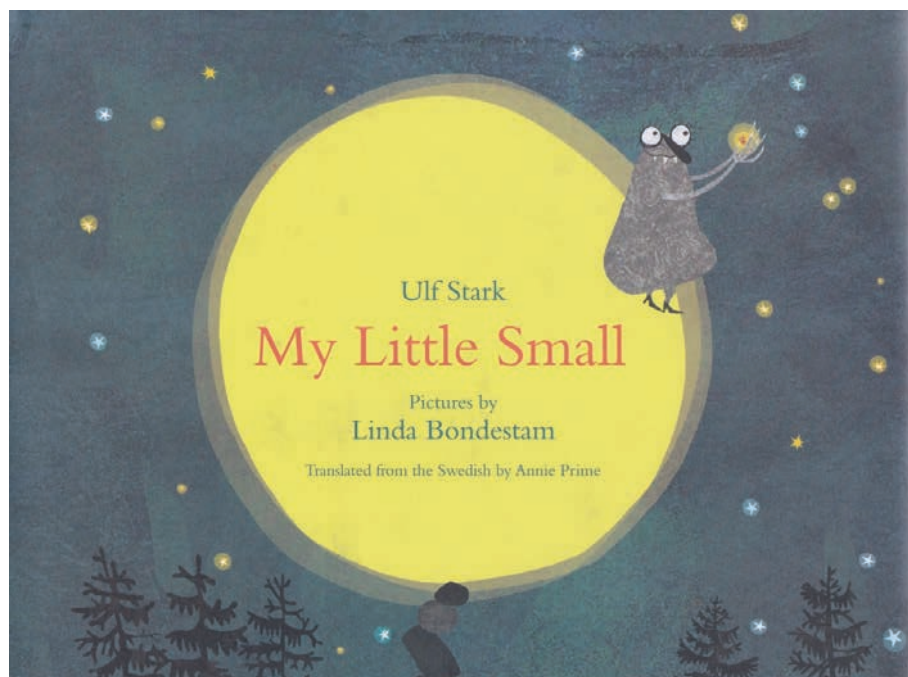
June 13, 2018

[Link to review](#)

Ulf Stark and Linda Bondestam’s sweetly eccentric picture book “My Little Small” tells the story of a creature who lives alone in a cave until she befriends a sun spark. On the surface, it’s a story of finding a small friend to care for. Dig a little deeper, and Stark’s philosophical ruminations come through.

When I taught arts and crafts to young children, I was struck by how often they wanted to make a small creature they could keep in their pockets, to nurture and, often, to sleep with. I also worked with people in their 70s and 80s, people with disabilities, people who were becoming increasingly isolated in life whose lives were made less difficult by adopting small dogs or cats.

My Little Small by Ulf Stark, pictures by Linda Bondestam, translated from Swedish by Annie Prime, published by Enchanted Lion Press, 2018, addresses this need to nurture and be needed in a funny and subtle way. It’s possibly the most enjoyable picture book I’ve read this year — and that encompasses a lot of picture books from those published in 1950s til the present.



*“In a mountain deep in a cave,
in the dark, there lives a Creature.
The sun hurts her eyes and her skin, too.
If she were to outside in the daylight,
she would feel a little sick. Then very sick.
Then she would die.
So she she stays inside and, like the mountain,
is gray, gray, gray.”*

Right away, you know this is no ordinary children’s book — introducing weakness, sickness and death on the first page. And yet the Creature peeking out to check for the setting sun is anything but macabre, even with her sharp teeth. She has this wide-eyed innocence and curiosity that springs to light in Bondestam’s energetic grays.

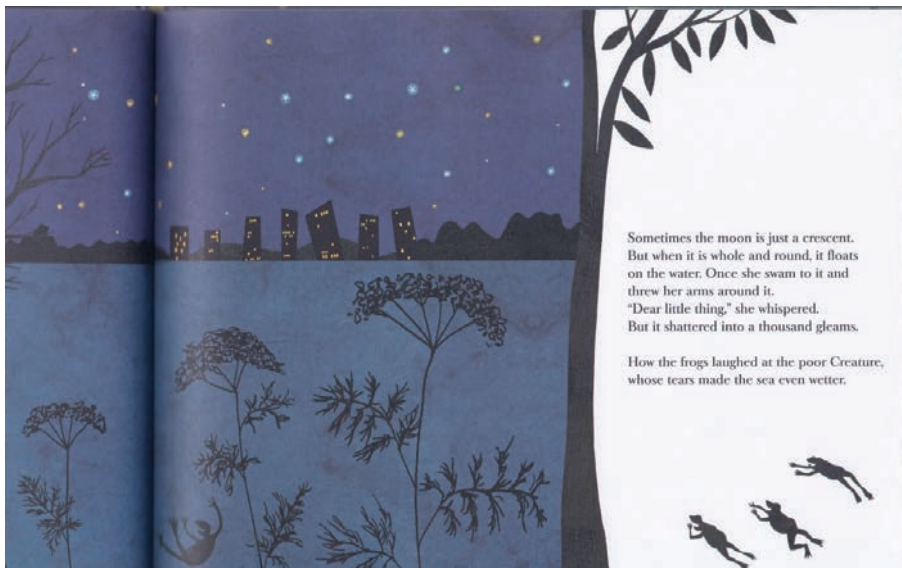


During the day, she watches the shadows slide along the walls of her cave as she tries to sleep. “It’s the same outside,” she muses. “Gray, gray, gray.”

She counts her fingers and toes to fall asleep. When she’s done, she sucks her thumb. “Go to sleep,” she tells herself.

Sometimes she dreams of the moon and of having someone small to sing to and care for.

She tries hard to nurture herself and not feel too lonely, singing songs with her growly voice — “GRR.” But sometimes she gets grumpy, pounds rocks, and grinds them between her teeth. She falls in love with reflection of the moon on the water but when she tries to swim out to it and embrace it:



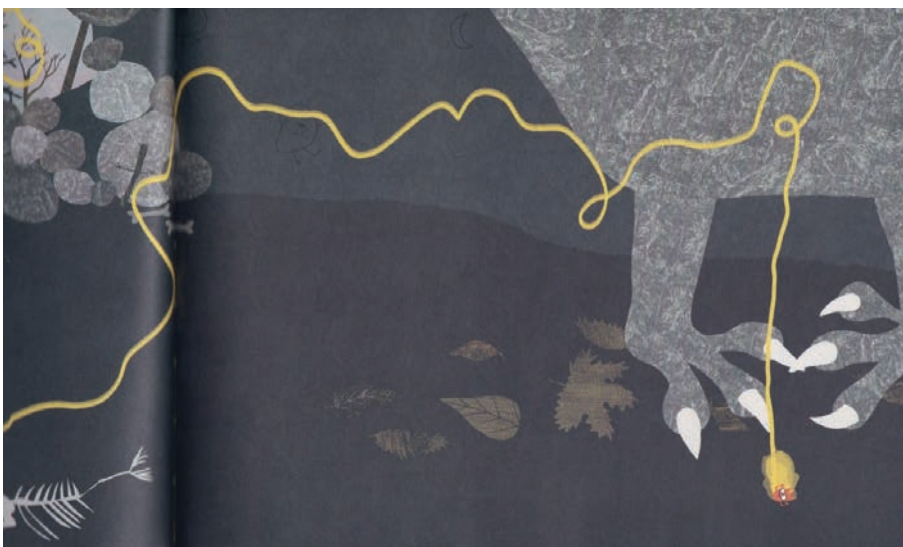
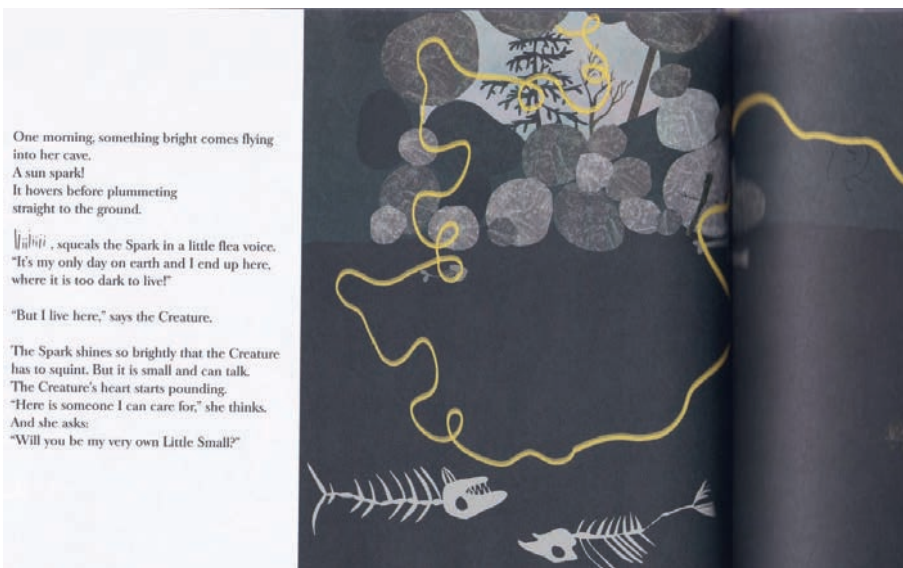
Sometimes the moon is just a crescent. But when it is whole and round, it floats on the water. Once she swam to it and threw her arms around it. “Dear little thing,” she whispered. But it shattered into a thousand gleams.

How the frogs laughed at the poor Creature, whose tears made the sea even wetter.



The story is full of lovely amusing phrases such as the Creature's tears making "the sea even wetter."

But one day, a fragile spark flies into her cave:





And so begins a relationship between two creatures who can't possibly fulfill each others' needs. The Spark and the Creature know their time is limited, yet they fill it with stories and friendship. The Spark tells the Creature about the beauty of the world of light. Then we are treated to a look at all the colors of the earth:



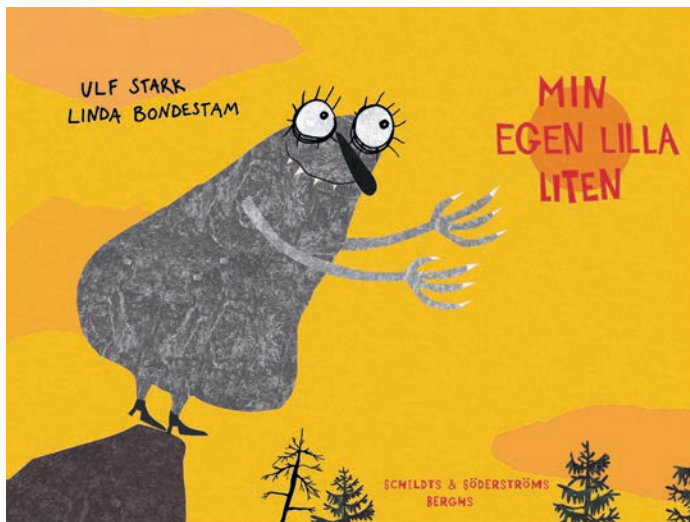
Ulf Stark, the author of this book, was one of Sweden's most beloved poets. He wrote some 100 books for children and young adults, as well as screen plays. The translator, Annie Prime, is literary translator of Spanish, French, Swedish and Russian, who received her MA in translation from University College, London, and has translated 5 books. This version of *My Little Small* is vibrant, witty and completely engaging. I love that there is lots of text — some picture books nowadays are so short, you hardly have a chance to bond with it or the child you're reading it with.

Linda Bondestam, the illustrator, lives in Helsinki. A graduate of Kingston University, London, she has illustrated more than 25 books and has been nominated for the Astrid Lindgrin Memorial Award, the highest award in children's literature.

There is a silliness to this story, but also an elegance we rarely find in children's books.

It's amusing, but it honors the fact that children go through melancholy, experience loss, and long for someone to understand them. Children have complex lives and emotions. How refreshing to read a book that doesn't shy away from that.

Enchanted Lion Books has always published books that take into account the complexity and curiosity of childhood. They also publish translated books from around the world, which is so vital for American children. It's why, so often, their books are good for all ages. You can read more about this remarkable press here, in an interview with publisher Claudia Bedrick, in *World Without Borders*: <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/childrens-literature-in-translation-enchanted-lion-books-anna-dalton> ↵







Good Night, Earth

03/04/2021

[Link to review](#)

Told from the perspective of a green alien family on a faraway planet, Bondestam's endearing solo debut offers a peek into the fictional bedtime routines of animals from around the world. Young readers will learn the habits of familiar animals (Little Chimp needs his mother to play at least 73 songs on the ukulele) as well as less well-known creatures (the axolotl "reads his favorite book," the cover of which matches this one). Offbeat humor permeates the text ("Jump into your beds, / Papa Kiwi hollers. / But no! He has to play flying raisins for hours") and accompanies Bondestam's quirky, multipatterned collage-style illustrations. The penultimate bedtime routine will resonate with parental readers, while the final spreads offer a last laugh for young ones. Ages 3–6. ↵

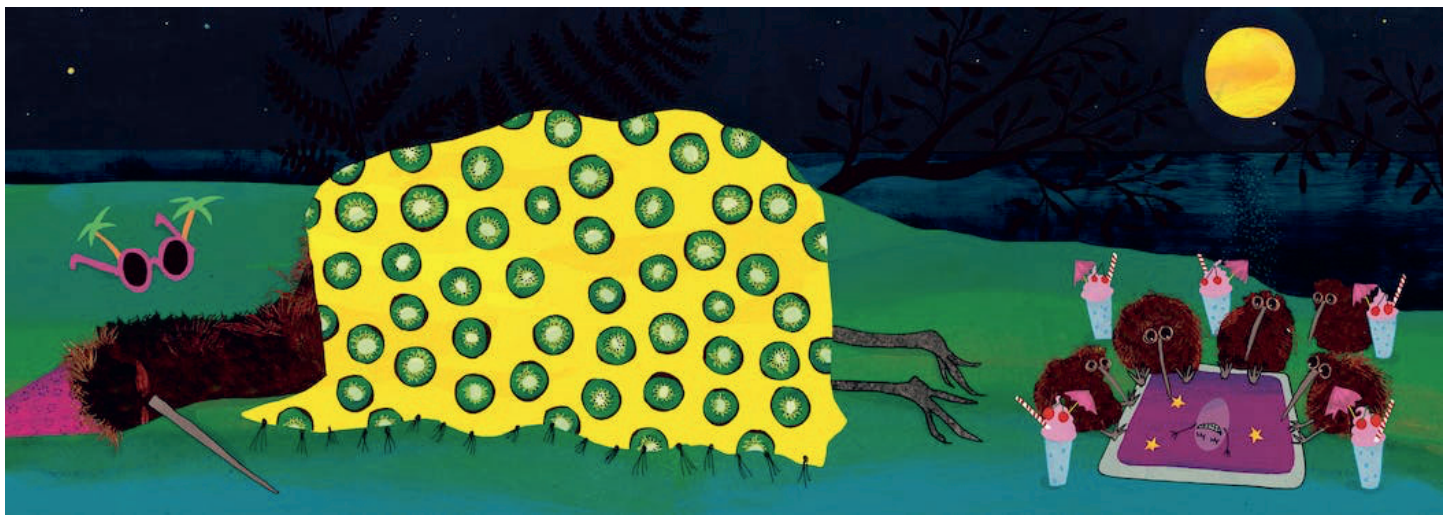


Review: ‘Good Night, Earth,’ by Linda Bondestam, translated from the Swedish by Galit Hasan-Rokem

By Laurie Hertzler Star Tribune

April 30, 2021

[Link to review](#)



The meerkat family gets ready for bed with a few evening yoga stretches. The baby kiwis don't want to go to bed; they bounce around until papa kiwi falls asleep and then they play some more. The owl family, on the other hand, falls asleep just as everyone else is waking up.

In “Good Night, Earth” (Restless Books, \$20, ages 3-6), Finnish artist Linda Bondestam’s funny and beautiful picture book (translated from the Swedish by Galit Hasan-Rokem), a couple of lumpy green creatures from a faraway planet spy on the baffling bedtime habits of Earthlings.

Bondestam’s mixed-media illustrations — drawing, painting, paper and Photoshop — are wonderfully detailed, and she picked unusual creatures (an axolotl, a tarsier, those meerkats) to depict, giving them all vivid expressions. Some look demonic, some worried, some deeply suspicious, some (the kiwis) slightly crazed. It’s the eyes. They all have great, expressive eyes.

This is a fun book for anytime you want to be reminded (or remind your child) about the wonderful varied creatures of this planet. ↵

Rootless but not voiceless

Hufvudstadsbladet

Written by Mia Österlund

Translation by Josefin Öst

14.10.2021

[Link to original review in Swedish](#)

You are all right, but you are not my mother. Could it get more gripping than that? Mia Österlund reads a children's book about an unaccompanied refugee child.

"You are not my mother". This line is repeated over and over, like a chorus, in this picture book. Frank Furu skilfully navigates the us/you constellation that is inevitable when a unaccompanied refugee child is to acclimatize into Finnish society. A notable trend in picture book publishing is experimenting with addressing the reader. More picture books are now told in the first person, something that was previously regarded as tricky. This book also employs a first-person narrator, and she is putting her foot down. Her source of pain is palpable: You are okay, but you are not my mother. Could it get more gripping than that?



Pictures that carry and anchor

Literary debutante Frank Furu has a decade of experience of working with refugee children. He has now been given a golden ticket into picture book publishing. Having your story illustrated by one of Finland's and the Nordics', even the worlds, biggest picture book illustrators gives you an edge. Linda Bondestam chooses the horizontal-oriented landscape book format in order to utilize a wide picture surface, and the picture rhythm she creates is exquisite. Even the supporting characters are masterfully drawn and are given their own interweaving storylines for the reader to follow.

The narrator never loses her otherness. "Sometimes they forget that I am different. We just play, and nobody notices. And yet, somebody always notices." Her body becomes "all tangled and black", everything gets bottled up. Bondestam visualized this convulsive feeling of inadequacy by having an enormous, roaring tiger burst out of the child's mouth. The Ostrobothnian fields and small-town milieus are dazzlingly depicted in the illustrations: A well-known, local sausage vendor and a closed-down bank office provide some humor

for the grown-up reader. Furu's writing is suitably bare and minimal, leaving it to the illustrations to create mood and colour. The side characters are mainly depicted through the illustrations. The social workers are sensitively depicted, always patient and present.

Aysha is battling the trauma of having left or lost her family. She acts out her loss by kicking her plush Moomin toy, provided to her for comfort, and sending it flying through the air. Stiff-legged and stark white, the Moomintroll now lies on her bed as a symbol of whiteness and of a cultural heritage Aysha has not yet acquired. No matter how kind and caring everyone is, she still misses her mother. She hardly even allows herself to have fun, because her longing encapsulates her: "I don't want to feel good, not without my mother". The time it takes to slowly heal, even slightly, is beautifully depicted in sequences of waiting, stillness and return. As a nod to the Somali-speaking reader, there is a line of text under an illustrated photo of Aysha's family, saying in Somali that the photo is for her. In daydream sequences, Aysha is once again back in her home country, sensing familiar tastes, scents and presence.



Dagarna går, dåliga dagar och bra dagar.
Ibland blir det många bra dagar.

Genom att Frank Furu och Linda Bondestam känsligt gestaltar ett ensamkommande barns inre slitningar tecknas samtidigt en bild av ett tolerant, humant och välkomnande Finland.

A vision of a welcoming Finland

You are not my mother is a forceful answer to the debate regarding who our Finland Swedish children's literature is depicting. Through Furu's and Bondestam's sensitive depiction of an unaccompanied refugee child's inner turmoil, a picture is simultaneously being drawn of a tolerant, humane, and welcoming Finland. It is a welcome and fresh take, that also shows us all that children's literature can be utilized for: among other things, to create visions of social sustainability, solidarity, and justice. This is an example of a new kind of political children's book that doesn't compromise, neither when it comes to ideology nor aesthetics. That this is achieved entirely without preaching, and that all characters in the book are allowed to be complex, is significant. First and foremost, however, space is given to Aysha's stormy feelings: They are allowed to take up space and time, and they are validated. It is okay that grief never really goes away.

This book does also navigate the minefield of who is allowed to write about what. The care and depth that characterize the book tells us that the authors are aware of this dilemma. The text sometimes borders on being too cheesy, and particularly the ending is unnecessarily explicitly explained – it would have sufficed to say less, and to reduce the text even more. Bondestam raises the temperature throughout the book, on the premises given to her by the story: Her immutable artistry fully comes into its own. Because of this, it is only right that by the end of the book, the written narrative is toned down while the pictorial storytelling continues, showing a harmonious beach trip where toy bark boats are being sent off to sea, and where care workers in yellow crocs and characteristic hipster beards watch over everything. All these little markers telling us that the story happens in the here and now make the book as a whole even more current and urgent: This book is taking place in our time and has something important to say about it. ↙



My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl by Linda Bondestam

By Stephanie Tournas

May 9, 2022

[Link to review](#)

My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl by Linda Bondestam. Translated from the Swedish by A. A. Prime. Restless Books, 2022. 9781632061386

Rating: 1-5 (5 is an excellent or a Starred review) 5

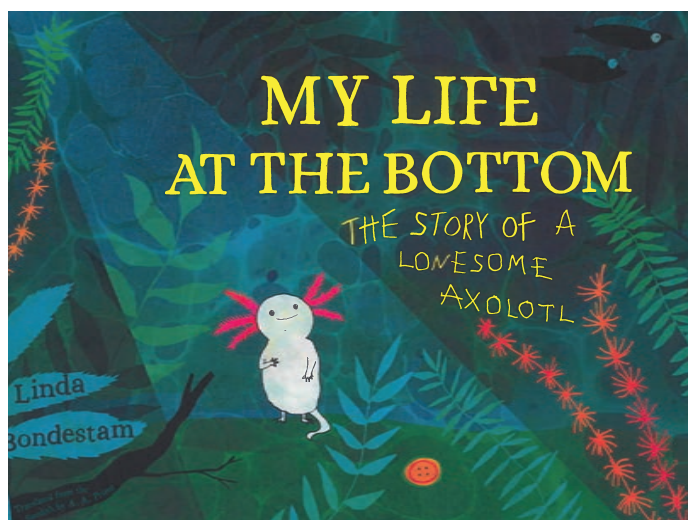
Format: Hardcover

Genre: Fantasy picture book

What did you like about the book? A little axolotl, living at the bottom of a murky lake, narrates a story about love and pollution. At first the axolotl finds plenty to eat, and enjoys friendships with fish, tiger salamanders, and snails. They pass the time playing, going to school, and finding treasures – garbage and lost items that the “big lugs” pollute the water with. But, as more and more pollution muddies the water, there are fewer and fewer of his friends left. Axolotl is lonesome. One day there is a catastrophe – the waters explode, and the earth is flooded. When the catastrophe is over, there is another axolotl! They become friends, and eventually they are parents to 987 little axolotls! His life at the bottom “had become the tops!”

Bondestam’s signature wry humor and quirky art are on display in this longer picture book which reads like a tongue in cheek memoir. It’s also a cautionary tale about how human pollution can affect even the hardiest little creatures. Readers will learn a bit about axolotls (they can regenerate limbs!) and get a sense of how our life styles – fast food, phones, inattention to the life around us – can impact other species. The mixed media art – pen and ink, collage and more – has so much fun detail. Little readers and their parents will enjoy cataloguing the many ‘treasures’ that the little axolotl finds, especially when he finds a smartphone and delights in watching videos online.

I liked the front and end quotations. The quotation at the beginning is from Michael Collins, an Apollo 11 astronaut, which mentions how fragile earth seemed from space. At the end, NASA astronaut Ed Lu’s quotation talks about how



robust life on Earth seems to him! Kids and their parents can talk about which view they agree with. ↵

Anything you didn’t like about it?

No

To whom would you recommend this book?

For kids ages 5-7 who enjoy longer picture books.

Who should buy this book?

Elementary school and public libraries

Where would you shelve it?

Picture books

Should we (librarians/readers) put this on the top of our “to read” piles?

Yes

Reviewer’s Name, Library (or school), City and State:

Stephanie Tournas, Robbins Library, Arlington, MA

Date of review:

May 9, 2022



9. The 5 books sent to jurors



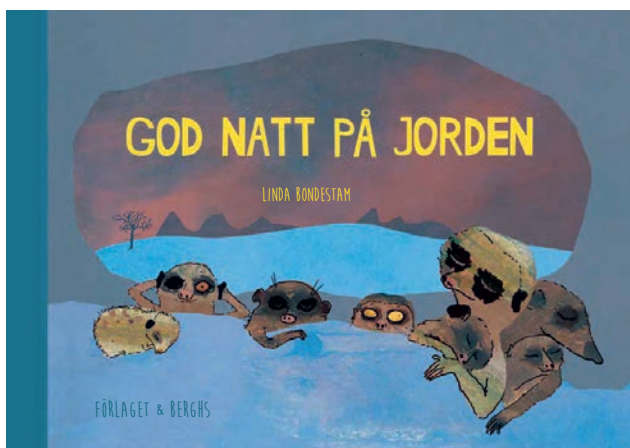
1. ***Djur som ingen sett utom vi***
Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us

Words by Ulf Stark
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2016)



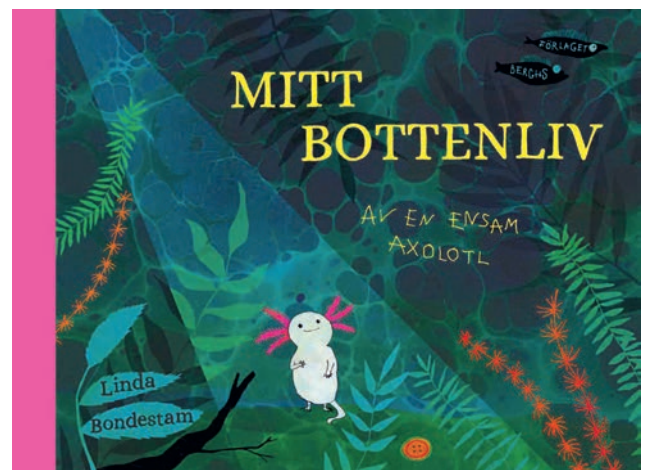
2. ***Ni är inte min mamma***
You Are Not My Mother

Words by Frank Furu
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2021)



3. ***God natt på jorden***
Good Night Earth

(Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, 2018 Finland & Sweden)



4. ***Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl***
My Life at the Bottom

(Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2020)



5. *Om du möter en björn* **If You Meet a Bear**

Words by Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup
(Förlaget, Finland/Sweden/Denmark 2020)



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LINDA BONDESTAM
NOMINATION FOR THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS 2022

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Photo by Niklas Sandström

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